DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 298 563 CS 506 335

AUTHOR Asahina, Roberta R.
TITLE The Viability of Ethnographic Research for Hispanic Consumer Research.
PUB DATE Feb 88
NOTE 19p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for the Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (71st, Portland, OR, July 2-5, 1988).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Evaluative/Feasibility (142)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advertising; Consumer Economics; *Cultural Context; *Ethnography; *Hispanic Americans; Media Research; Qualitative Research
IDENTIFIERS *Advertising Effectiveness; Consumer Evaluation; *Consumers

ABSTRACT

A study explored whether ethnographic research is appropriate and feasible for Hispanic consumer research. Subjects, 41 Hispanic advertising executives (out of an original group of 80) in advertising agencies listed in the Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies from New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, and San Antonio, answered a 23-item questionnaire. The respondents were asked whether their firms employ ethnographic research, and if so, which types of products, and the sample size in an "ethnography." Fifteen opinion statements, arranged on a Likert scale, asked for agreement on the comparable value of ethnographic research to more traditional methods of research for Hispanic consumers: telephone surveys, door-to-door interviews, and in-home diaries; the use of ethnographic research for gaining specific information about Hispanic consumers. Results indicated that 86% of the respondents agree ethnographic research has value for developing Hispanic advertising campaigns. The same number agree ethnographic research is a viable, important research tool. Overall, this form of research appears to be valuable for describing consumer product usage, group interaction of a product, specific cultural practices, consumer behavior, and consumer environment. Ethnographic research has more value when used in conjunction with other forms of statistical measurement, but does provide useful consumer information for developing Hispanic advertising campaigns, since--in order to appeal to Hispanic consumers of different origins--the definition of cultural attributes is necessary. (Fourteen references are attached.) (RAE)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED298563

THE VIABILITY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH FOR HISPANIC CONSUMER RESEARCH

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Roberta Asahina
TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy

Prepared by

Roberta R. Asahina, Ph.D.
Associate Professor
Department of Journalism
California State University, Fresno

February 1988

CS506335

THE VIABILITY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

FOR HISPANIC CONSUMER RESEARCH

This study was partially funded by the Chancellor's Office of the California State University system through an Affirmative Action Equity Grant. Research funded through an Affirmative Action Equity Grant is to produce answers related to specific minority-dominant markets, as well as provide educational information relative to that minority-dominant market. California is a major Hispanic market. This research addresses the advertising needs of this market, as well as the advertising needs of other major Hispanic markets.

THE VIABILITY OF ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

FOR HISPANIC CONSUMER RESEARCH

The purpose of this paper is to explore whether ethnographic research is appropriate and feasible for Hispanic consumer research.

BACKGROUND INTRODUCTION:

Ethnography is the branch of anthropology dealing with the scientific description of cultures. Ethnographic research is an observational technique practiced in different forms by major advertising agency research departments but used essentially for the same purpose: to develop messages which correctly match the target. Ethnographies refer to the individual studies which are compiled in an "ethnographic." In total, the final analysis of the individual studies which may number from 12 to 25 for each segment of a larger-defined target, will present the non-verbal, visual symbols of the consumer's environment, product usage patterns, interaction among other consumers in a family or workplace, and finally offer the visual and verbal clues which help a creative department develop the correct look and message of a commercial. Subjects are selected through research defining subsets of a target or from focus group programs. They are paid between $25 and $200 for their time which may run from several hours to several days. These observations may take place in brief sessions over a period of time or in one long session from sunup to lights out over the course of one full day. Trained observers take careful notes or tape record interviews, while trained photographers capture the most minute details of the household or day-in-the-

life environment. This close scrutiny of a consumer's life--especially as a package of many observations in each subset of a target--provide a closer view of the target market and how they use a specific product. Refined analysis or evaluation reports are developed for creative departments to aid in the development of visually correct, "on target" commercials.

To understand how ethnographic research is practiced, the following examples illustrate varying techniques and expectations for two New York advertising agencies, both pioneers in observational research, and one New York-based research firm which specializes in ethnographies.

Young and Rubicam[1]

Young and Rubicam's Creative Research Department specializes in techniques designed to make decisions on advertising messages. Their observational studies are called "ethnographies," and the man who has developed the widespread use of this technique is Joseph Plummer. He now heads a branch of Young and Rubicam entitled Y & R Ventures.

> Ethnography tends to work as a context provider--an enriching, background mosaic--and in that respect it is very powerful. The notion is that in order to study rituals and symbols, one has to go to the environment where the symbols exist and the rituals occur.[2]

Young and Rubicam will study eight homes in a given target subset. Says Susan Wurtzel, Vice President of Creative Research, "We select people based on target ideas from the client's research data base, borrowing from VALS people categories, attitudinal research, and specific demographics. We put a demographic screen together with an attitudinal screener. When we have a numerical and behavioral portrait, we recruit people, generally heavy users, and some medium and light users."[3]

An experienced discussion guide and still photographer go into a home of a participant who has agreed to the close scrutiny, and who will be paid between $75 and $100 for two to four hours time. The photographer takes pictures of everything--room by room--collecting photographic studies of the consumer's life and household right down to the smallest details of family photos, momentos, bathroom cabinet, kitchen pantry, furnishings, and hobbies. The discussion guide is a trained observer who takes notes on what the house looks and feels like, what the participant displays on the walls, what magazines are placed on the coffee table, what items they treasure, and tape records any discussion. Wurtzel indicates, "These observations are spring boards for creative teams--helping to redefine VALS category research, understand the target, and how they use the product within the target's natural setting, including the interplay of the members of the family. We try to provide as much dimension as we can about the consumer, so that we can introduce this consumer to Creative."[4]

Ethnographies prepared for a Breyer's ice cream study, for example, portrayed how consumers use ice cream like therapy: consumers used favorite bowls for their ice cream, used various types of ice cream-dipping spoons, and especially enjoyed curling up and cradling their ice cream as they ate in the comfort of large easy chairs; consumers soothed themselves in their own ice cream ritual. For a study on cheese, ethnographies demonstrated different uses for the product between VALS types: belongers and achievers. A slide show with voice-over, analyzing results and interviews is presented to the creative department preparing an advertising campaign for a product. Says Wurtzel, "Ethnography presents a fantastic opportunity to get to know people in context, to write advertising which is compelling and meaningful."[5]

N. W. Ayer[6]

N. W. Ayer uses ethnographic research quite differently. Rather than study groups of consumers in a single household, N. W. Ayer singles out identified product users and completes a "day-in-the-life" observation of a given sample within the sub-segments of their product users. The trained observer's role is inobtrusive, more a silent observer, taking notes, but not questioning the user or attempting to get the consumer to voice attitudes or values. The ethnographic study is tied to visual clues. A photographer takes hundreds of shots of the consumer going about the business of his or her life. From the time this product user wakes up, the products they use to prepare for the day, the breakfast they eat, the car they drive, their routine and place of work, the relationships they have at work, the places they go for lunch or after work, the dinner they eat, the people they enjoy their leisure time with, all the activities and human relationships in a day--create a portrait of each individual target in a user segment. These detailed photographic portraits offer new dimensions in the understanding of a target. Says Jim Donius, Vice President of Research, "Ethnographic research is tied to new business, segmentation research, life-style or VALS segmentation where multiple categories exist, or where new customer models must be built. N. W. Ayer uses ethnographic research to understand relevant purchase behavior, analyzing the most minute details of an observational for defining or redefining how a target thinks, behaves at home, at work, in relation to others."[7]

Donius indicates the re-working of the Michelob Tonight campaign was due in part to the discoveries made within an ethnographic study. The target was not the high-end, young, upwardly mobile, professional; but, rather the young,

upwardly mobile blue collar single with a good job, important responsibilities, a network of employees and friends, various attractive women companions: their real beer drinker. Says Donius, "What N. W. Ayer creates is an identification-aspiration study for the creative department's use. Our observation creates a whole non-verbal picture of the product user, used to prioritize a target and create a strategic statement."[8]

N. W. Ayer spends $200 per observation. The resulting report is largely a visual portfolio with notes from the observer. The agency will use approximately 12 people per segment in an ethnography. Finally, N. W. Ayer's use of ethnography relates to their agency's desire for human contact. Good advertising, according to Donius, creates human contact. "How we look is more important than writing. This is a right brain approach to the execution of advertising, providing another ear to the creative director, and bringing a new dimension to every problem."[9]

House Calls, Concept Development Company[10]

House Calls distinguishes its ethnographic research by using a video camera. The firm approaches its subjects like a news story, but softens the intrusion of observer and video cameraman by using women interviewers and women photographers. Participants are paid $30 and a product usage study might include observations up to 200 people representing all personalities and various markets where a product is being tested. The sessions of study last from three-fourths to two-and-a-half hours each. The observer/interviewer uses a tape recorder rather than taking notes. The subjects are selected from focus groups, and at the time the observation takes place, they have had some experience with the product or product category. Generally, House Calls has used its ethnographies for studying new products. Their results reports are

detailed video presentations with accompanying written report. The evaluation includes directions for marketing and creative strategy.

Participants in a House Calls ethnographic are given the product in advance and use it for several weeks. The interviewer arrives, sets up quickly, and begins the first hour with questions related to the consumer's aspirations, lifestyle, needs, wants, values, and opinions. Then, the second hour moves into questions about product and product usage. Often, the consumer discovers uses for a product the manufacturer or marketer cannot project, or product benefits which can provide new creative strategy, such as Wella Balsam Conditioning Mousse or Arm and Hammer Baking Soda. The target/user is asked to demonstrate how they use the product or demonstrate some of the discoveries they have made about the product. Their comments about the things they like or don't like about the product can also be revealing.

"These observations elicit reactions you can't get in the artificial atmosphere of a mall intercept interview or on the street, or in a door-to-door solicited trial of the product," says Bill Abrahms, President of House Calls. "The video camera also makes it possible to record the user/prospect's home and environmental details."[11] House Calls organizes, analyzes, and provides a final report which is an approximately 45-minute video evaluation of the product and potential market, including a priority ranking of the possible strategic, creative approaches. Notes Abrahms, "These observations do not substitute for quantitative research, but provide a content analysis with tabs of both verbal and body language of a product user."[12] Packaged goods and personal care products benefit from ethnographic research according to Abrahms. Furthermore, he notes two additional benefits from this type of

research: one, the extra time a researcher gets to spend with the consumer in the consumer's household; and two, the insights provided by participants who enjoy participating in an ethnographic. Says Abrahms, "We have no problem recruiting people for a study. People want to have a forum; they want to make a difference in the way a product is promoted or positioned in an advertising campaign."[13] From the reality recorded by the video camera, House Calls draws conclusions regarding implications for creative strategy.

THE PROBLEM:

Ethnographic research is not widely used by Hispanic advertising agencies. In a study of 32 Hispanic advertising agencies in New York, Los Angeles, Miami, Chicago, and San Antonio, only four agencies reported using ethnographic research. The use of ethnographies varies by these agencies from tracking studies to various methods of observing and recording cultural practices. Ethnographic research in these major Hispanic agencies is used for packaged goods, food, major household items, and personal care products.

The need for a viable research tool for the Hispanic consumer market relates to four concerns.[14] First, the Hispanic advertising market is growing and the need to understand the changing target in burgeoning Hispanic population centers is imperative. Second, current research methods present various problems to Hispanic advertising researchers, including telephone surveys, door-to-door interviews, mall intercepts, and in-home media use diaries. For example, telephone interviews present a problem when only half the Spanish-speaking market may own telephones. In some areas of Los Angeles, this may increase to 85%, but valid samples are at times difficult. Door-to-door interviews can alleviate this problem, but this method of gathering consumer information also meets obstacles. Researchers find Hispanic

consumers reluctant to answer questions from strangers, and skeptical to participate in any information-gathering project. Recent immigration laws create an additional intimidation factor. This, along with the Hispanic homeowner's natural desire for privacy and the protection of the family home life, makes research intrusive and consumer surveys an invasion of privacy--certainly not welcomed with open arms. Focus groups, on the other hand, have provided consumer insights. Recruitment techniques overcome problems with show-up rates.

A third concern is language. Not all Hispanic consumers are Spanish-speaking only. Hispanic advertising agencies direct messages to Spanish-only, predominately Spanish with some English, and predominately English with some Spanish. Consumer research has to adapt to various mixes of language as well. Information gatherers must be bilingual. Then too, this same interplay of language is reflected in the assimilation and enculturation of various Hispanic populations. First generation consumers hold tightly to old ways and cultural practices. Then too, economic factors create purchases of basic physical need and survival. Second and third generation Hispanics vary in degrees of assimilation, enculturation, and economic security. Therefore, cultural practices and product consumption changes.

Fourth, each Hispanic advertising market is different because of the ethnic or national background of its dominant Hispanic population. Los Angeles and San Antonio are Mexican. New York is primarily Puerto Rican. Miami is mostly Cuban. Chicago has a mix of Latino origins. These localized differences create the need for research which provides information specific to the local, ethnic background. Considering the problems related to conducting Hispanic consumer research: problems in implementing traditional

methods, variation in the use of Spanish language, stages of assimilation and enculturation, differences in local or ethnic markets, and the increasing size and importance of this advertising market, the need for viable research tools exists. Ethnographic research is only part of the solution. However, this source of qualitative research provides information which can help define specific targets and their product usage relative to specific cultural practices in localized markets. The method is timely, affordable, and appropriate for research questions relative to how consumers use products in natural environments, group interaction to a product, attitudes and values related to lifestyle, and visual clues which can be used in the preparation of advertising messages which correctly match the target.

Given the assumption ethnographic research is a valuable tool, appropriate for the development of Hispanic advertising messages, and feasible to implement, a study was conducted to obtain the executive opinions and perceptions of Hispanic advertising professionals regarding their current use of ethnographic research, its comparable value to other methods of research, its value in providing consumer information and insights, as well as perceived limitations of its use and implementation.

Following is a discussion of that study and its implications regarding the viability of ethnographic research for Hispanic advertising.

THE STUDY:

The purpose of the executive study was to determine current use and value of ethnographic research for Hispanic advertising campaigns. The study was designed to obtain the opinions of Hispanic advertising agency executives in a 23-item questionnaire. Questions asked if these executives' firms employ ethnographic research, and if so, which types of products, and sample size in

an ethnography. Fifteen opinion statements, arranged on a Likert scale, asked for agreement on the comparable value of ethnographic research to more traditional methods of research for Hispanic consumers: telephone surveys, door-to-door interviews, and in-home diaries; the use of ethnographic research for gaining specific information about Hispanic consumers; group versus individual finding; value for higher or lower income Hispanics; group interaction to a product; use within the home or outside the home; value for describing behavior, environment, cultural practices product usage, and consumer attitudes; as well as statements relative to limitations, implementation, and overall value for developing advertising campaigns. An open-ended question was used to gain each executive's overall opinion of ethnographic research for the Hispanic consumer market and for developing Hispanic advertising campaigns.

The sample included 80 Hispanic advertising executives in advertising agencies listed in the Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies. The yellow pages provided additional agencies not listed in the Directory. The markets represented in this study include New York, Los Angeles, Chicago, Miami, and San Antonio. 41 questionnaires were returned. These responses represent the largest Hispanic agencies, specifically those handling nationally prominent accounts. Considering the fact many smaller agencies do not handle research within their own firms, and the fact many smaller Hispanic advertising agencies handle local, retail accounts, a follow-up was not necessary. The insights provided by the executives in these larger Hispanic advertising agencies are important. Furthermore, the major portion of Hispanic advertising originates from a relatively small group of Hispanic advertising specialists.

This study includes the opinions of executives from the largest agencies.

RESULTS:

About a third of the advertising executives participating in the study indicate their firms use some form of observational research. Four of the agencies describe this research as "ethnographic." These firms are located in New York, Miami, and San Antonio.

According to 41% of the respondents, ethnographic research is used for specific products, most generally food, packaged good, household cleaners, and personal care products. Furthermore, when developing observational research, 95% of the respondents indicate their firms use samples of 25 of more households.

The opinion statements provided various insights. For example, 67% of the Hispanic advertising executives feel ethnographic research can have more value then telephone surveys in providing information about Hispanic consumers. Compared to door-to-door interviews, 43% of the respondents indicate ethnographic research has more value. In both statements, 13% of the participants disagreed. All others neither agreed nor disagreed. Only one third of the subjects indicate agreement with the statement ethnographic research has more value then in-home diaries for media usage; 13% disagreed, and 53% neither agreed nor disagreed.

Ethnographic research has more value for studying groups then individuals say 74% of the respondents; 26% neither agreed nor disagreed. Further, every participant indicates ethnographic research is an important tool for describing group interaction to a product. A third of the advertising executives agreed ethnographic research is best used when confined to describing symbols, cultural practices, and offering visual descriptions of a

product in use. However, another third of the respondents disagreed: ethnographic research does not have to be confined to describing cultural practices or visual clues of product usage.

86% of the respondents indicate ethnographic research is extremely valuable for defining consumer behaviors and environments of the product user. Furthermore, 86% agreed ethnographic research is a valuable tool for determining consumer attitudes. Similarly, the same percentage of respondents indicate ethnographic research has value for helping to develop advertising campaigns.

Only 43% of these executives agreed ethnographic research is particularly suited for Hispanic consumers; 27% disagreed. Further, 66% feel this research is better suited for studying higher income consumers rather than lower income consumers; 10% disagreed. Finally, 70% of the study's participants agree ethnographic research is most valuable when related to or supporting existing statistical research.

Concerning the limitations of implementing ethnographic research, 43% agreed observational methods are difficult to employ for products outside the home; 43% disagreed with the statement. Only a third of the respondents indicate ethnographic research is difficult to administer because it requires trained observers. Half of the subjects agree that ethnographic research is most valuable for products which are used often. Related to sample size and validity, 47% of these executives indicate no problem with the validity of limited samples in an ethnographic study.

In conclusion, 86% of the respondents agree ethnographic research has value for developing Hispanic advertising campaigns. The same number agree ethnographic research is a viable, important research tool. Furthermore, the

same percentage of respondents indicate ethnographic research is important for defining consumer attitudes. Every participant indicated ethnographic research has the most value for defining and describing group interaction to a product.

The open-ended question provided overall positive comments in support of ethnographic research, which "specifically helps determine differences among Hispanic groups of different origins: Mexicans, Puerto Ricans, Cubans, etc." and helps in "solving problems in relation to product position, or introduction." Several executives noted its use in conjunction with focus groups, pointing out, "you cannot appeal to the Hispanic market by using just Spanish language. We must appeal to the Hispanic market through cultural attributes." Some concern was voiced regarding the application of social science methodology to real-life consumer behavior, noting "there is a tendency to categorize Hispanics as lower-income, less educated...there is also a growing recognition of district cultural traits and changing status...Ethnicity alone is a simplistic definition of consumers. A useful classification system would, therefore, combine ethnicity with other measures of consumer attitudes/behavior."

CONCLUSIONS FROM THE EXECUTIVE STUDY:

Ethnographic research is being employed in some Hispanic advertising agencies. Overall, this form of research appears to be a valuable tool for describing consumer product usage, group interaction to a product, specific cultural practices, consumer behavior, and consumer environment. Ethnographic research has more value when used in conjunction with other forms of statistical measurement, but does provide useful consumer information for developing Hispanic advertising campaigns. This form of research compares

favorably to more traditional methods of research for developing consumer information. Sample size and trained observers do not present obstacles to implementation or validity. Ethnographic research has more value for studying groups of consumers than individuals, and higher income consumers than lower income consumers, products which are used often, and products which are used in the home. Overall, ethnographic research offers an important tool for determining consumer attitudes as well as providing a descriptive mechanism for group interaction to a product. The information obtained from ethnographic research is useful for developing advertising campaigns specifically directed to Hispanic consumers of different origins where the definition of cultural attributes is necessary.

CONCLUDING REMARKS:

This paper has explored whether ethnographic research is viable for Hispanic consumer research when applied to advertising research and provided examples of current practices in major advertising agencies which employ this method. The executive study of Hispanic advertising agency executives provided insight regarding current use and value for ethnographic research in preparing Hispanic advertising campaigns. The study indicates some form of ethnographic research is already being used in some agencies. Overall, Hispanic advertising executives are positive about the value of ethnographic research and its feasibility for implementation.

FURTHER RESEARCH:

This author proposes research to develop an ethnographic model for Hispanic consumer research which could be applied on an affordable, timely, and feasible basis in local Hispanic markets by Hispanic advertising agencies, marketing researchers, or clients. Related to the development of this model

is the need to determine the specific techniques currently employed in the few Hispanic advertising agencies which now use some form of ethnographic research. Also, research addressing the concerns of Hispanic advertising professionals, and criteria directing the design of this model should be explored. Finally, focus group research can identify Hispanic consumer concerns relative to the methods of research used when ethnographies are conducted in their households. These three areas of research are in progress by this author.

ENDNOTES

[1] Personal interview, Susan Wurtzel, Vice President of Creative Research Young and Rubicam, Inc., New York, 285 Madison Avenue, New York, July 23, 1987.

[2] Singer, Karen, "Ethnography: Research That's Up Close and Personal," Adweek, September 29, 1986, pp. 3-32.

[3] Ibid, Wurtzel.

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Personal interview, James Donius, Senior Vice President, Director of Research, N. W. Ayer, 1345 Avenue of the Americas, New York, July 22, 1987.

[7] Ibid, Donius.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.

[10] Personal interview, Bill Abrahms, President, House Calls Concept Development Company 200 East 84th Street, New York, July 28, 1987.

[11] Ibid, Abrahms.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Personal interviews, Leon Potasinski, Vice President Media Director, and Debra L. Gish, Vice President, Business Director, Bermudez Associates, 12400 Wilshire Boulevard, Suite 1100 Los Angeles, California, July 9, 1987; Dr. Marshall Rogers, Vice President, Director of Research, DJMC, 818 West 7th Street, Fourth Floor, Los Angeles, California, August 11; Mr. Hector Orci, President, La Agencia de Orci y Asociados, 11340 West Olympic Boulevard, Suite 355, Los Angeles, California, August 11; Mr. Mario Lazo, Vice President/Media Director, Mendoza, Dillon & Asociados, Inc., 4685 MacArthur Court, Suite 420, Newport Beach, California, 92660, August 11, 1987; Telephone interview, Jorge Reynardus, Vice President, General Manager, Castor Spanish International, Inc., New York, July 22, 1987; Personal interview, Dr. Burleigh Gardner, Social Research Inc., Chicago, July 30, 1987; Letter, Wendy Bryan, Account Supervisor, Ferrer Ad America, Inc., Los Angeles, California, July 16, 1987; and Letter, Caroline Jones, President, Caroline Jones Advertising, Inc.; New York, July 20, 1987; Letter, Mario Lazo, Jr., Vice President Media Director, Mendoza, Dillon & Asociados, Inc., June 30, 1987. See also Jack Feuer, "Reforming Spanish Radio Ratings," Adweek, March 3, 1986, p. 12, and "Hispanic Research: What's the Right Call?", Adweek, September 15, 1986, p. 12; and, Alfred J. Jaffe, "Spanish Radio Works for Rating Service to Replace Arbitron," Television/Radio Age, May 25, 1987.